



## English 472: American Dialects

Spring 2005, Section 45894: M/W 2:00-3:50 p.m. in 4019 Brown

**Instructor:** Dr. Lisa Minnick

**Office:** 718 Sprau

**Office hours:** Mondays 4-5:30 p.m. and by appointment

**Email:** [lisa.minnick@wmich.edu](mailto:lisa.minnick@wmich.edu) (preferred mode of contact)

**Course Page:** <http://www.retroflexive.com/472main>

**From the catalog:** English 472 is study of regional and social varieties of American English from sociolinguistic perspectives, focusing on the forces that influence different types of language variation. Examines issues of linguistic bias and offers a multi-cultural perspective on the role of language in daily life.

**Course description, purpose, and objectives:** In this course, we will discuss the theories and practices of language variation research, particularly as applied to American English. In doing so, we will consider different approaches to the study of language variation, with attention to key figures, studies, and methodologies. We will discuss the functions and effects of dialectal variation, and how factors such as region, ethnicity, gender, social status and other extralinguistic variables interact with language and contribute to variation. We will also explore how popular perceptions and attitudes contribute to the differential valuation of American English varieties, and the effects of these valuations, along with what a study of dialects can contribute to education and approaches to literacy. Finally, students will learn the skills and practices of variation research and language description and will have the opportunity to apply these skills to their own dialect research projects.

**Texts:** Finegan and Rickford, *Language in the U.S.A.* Cambridge, 2004; and **course pack** (at bookstore).

### Assignments and grading:

Final exam	25%
Midterm exam	20%
Paper/project	15%
Northern Cities Shift project	15%
Homework, activities, quizzes	15%
Presentation	5%
Attendance and participation	5%

**Exams:** The midterm will include everything covered during the first half of the semester and the final will cover the second half as well as important earlier material. Each exam will include phonetic transcriptions, identification/short answer, and short essay questions covering lecture, discussion, and reading materials.

**Paper/project:** This assignment is an opportunity for you to conduct your own language-variation study and to present the results in journal-article format, as appropriate at the advanced-undergraduate level. We will discuss this project extensively in class as you generate ideas, carry out the research, and analyze the results. You may also be asked to present your findings orally to the class, time permitting.

**Northern Cities Shift project:** This is a collaborative project to collect and analyze evidence of the Northern Cities Shift among speakers in Southwest Michigan. Students will work together in small groups in and outside of class to gather and analyze linguistic data and write up the results in a short paper.

**Exercises and quizzes** will help keep you on track and up to date. Learning the discipline of linguistics is a cumulative process. Gaps in your knowledge early on can cause problems later.

**Presentations:** These will include individual and group presentations and discussion leadership on researched and textual materials. We'll set up a schedule for these early in the semester.

**Attendance and participation:** I think that English 472 is a fun and interesting course, but it requires a solid set of skills and base of knowledge that you will have to master early on, and therefore active participation is a must. This means you need to be present every day to the extent that it is humanly possible. Readings, discussions, and activities complement each other. If you must miss class, my policy is to permit three "freebie" absences. By "freebie," I mean that I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. I also mean that's all you get. Exceptions can only be made in cases of serious illness (such as those requiring hospitalization) and other documentable emergencies. If you miss more than three class meetings, there may be a substantial deduction in your course grade. Minimal absences reflect favorably. Excessive absences don't; and five or more may result in a course grade of F.

### Course Policies

**Academic honesty:** All work you turn in for this class must be your own, with all outside reference sources properly cited and acknowledged. Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, any kind of falsification or forgery, computer misuse, multiple submission, complicity, and any other type of academic dishonesty on any exams or work assigned for this course, will not be tolerated in any form. You are required to read and comply fully with the policies and definitions outlined in the Western Michigan University statement on academic integrity, which is available in the undergraduate and graduate student catalogs as well as online at <http://www.osc.wmich.edu/academicintegrity/catalog.html/>. If there is reason to believe any student has been involved in academic dishonesty, he or she will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. The student will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s) and have the opportunity for a hearing. Please consult with me if you are in doubt about how to cite a source in your paper, whether a source is appropriate, whether a citation is needed, if you are not sure what level of help on an assignment constitutes collusion, or with any other academic integrity questions. As I am also required to uphold the standards of academic integrity, my policy is zero tolerance for any type of deception, and I do not want for any of you to find out the hard way how seriously I take this.

**Students with disabilities** should contact Ms. Beth Denhartigh at the beginning of the semester at 387-2116 or by email at [beth.denhartigh@wmich.edu](mailto:beth.denhartigh@wmich.edu) so that any physical, learning, vision, hearing, psychiatric or other disability can be documented and accommodations arranged. Please note that a disability determination must be made by Ms. Denhartigh's office before accommodations can be made.

**Late work** is generally frowned upon in college and elsewhere, and this class is no exception. Arrangements should be made in advance (and you'll need a documentable explanation). Unexplained late work (or excuses after the fact) will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be assessed for the assignment.

**Being late to class** should never happen. Of course, we all have our moments, and infrequent lapses may occur. Overall, however, make it a habit to be in class on time. Otherwise, you risk missing important course content (such as instructions or quizzes) which may be over by the time you get there. Keep in mind that when you walk in late, it is distracting to other students. The same goes for leaving early. It is your responsibility to stay on top of what goes on in class whether you are there or not. If you are late, it is your responsibility to stay after class to make sure you have been marked present. **Absences resulting from uncorrected lates count towards your three allotted absences. Habitual lateness will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation score and hence your course grade. Leaving at the break will be recorded as an absence.**

**Makeups:** Daily assignments, exercises, quizzes, presentations, and in-class activities cannot be made up if missed because of lateness or absence. Makeups on major assignments, such as exams or papers, must be arranged with me in advance of due dates in order to avoid penalties, and you will have to make a pretty strong case in order to be granted an extension.

**Classroom etiquette:** You are not required to agree with everything you read or everything that is said during discussions in this class. You are encouraged to read and think critically. An open dialogue is encouraged, and all thoughtful contributions are welcome. I ask only that everyone be respectful during class discussions. The goal is for our classroom to be safe places for flexing your intellectual muscles, where everyone feels comfortable generating, expressing, and challenging ideas. Your help in reaching this goal is essential. Also,

please familiarize yourself with and be prepared to abide by WMU's code of student conduct at <<http://www.osc.wmich.edu/studentcode/conduct.html>>. Students who are not willing or able to respect the rights of everyone to a comfortable teaching and learning environment will be asked to leave.

**Other etiquette and classroom civility issues:** Sleeping, eating, grooming, reading non-course materials, doing homework, having conversations, **using any kind of electronic communication device**, and other such activities are discouraged because of their disruptive and impolite nature, and also because they keep you from fully participating. Your active participation is part of your course grade, of course, and also, nothing interesting will happen in class without your input. That is, the class will be as interesting as you make it. Showing up on time and prepared (that means completing all reading assignments and other homework and being ready to work when you get here) will help your grade as well as enhance your learning experience.

**Formatting for all written assignments:** All hard copies of assignments must be word-processed (typed) and double-spaced, including papers and written homework assignments. All papers must have 1" margins and follow MLA or Chicago style for page headings, page numbering, formatting and documentation. For formal essays, I prefer Times New Roman 12 or a comparably sized sans serif font (like Arial), if you prefer. **Electronic copies of assignments will not be accepted in lieu of hard copies.** Graded assignments, papers, and exams will generally be returned within one to two weeks.

**If you would like extra help with course material, you are always welcome in my office.** Drop by during my office hours (Mondays 4:00-5:30 p.m.), or make arrangements with me if you are not free during office hours so that we can set up a time to meet. Email any time if you have questions or concerns. During the week, I will usually respond within 24 hours; on weekends, it may be Monday morning before I am able to respond.

**Workload:** The workload for this course is substantial, with challenging (and plentiful) reading and written assignments. You will need to keep up with all readings and other deadlines as assigned in order to be fully prepared to participate in class discussions.

**A word to the wise:** Failure to follow directions is one of my two pet peeves; the other is failure to listen or read carefully when instructions are being given. The first is almost always a result of the second. Points will be deducted from work that does not properly respond to all requirements of the assignment. If you are ever not completely clear on what is being asked of you, please check with me either in person or via email.

**Grading criteria for all assignments:** Please note that this is a **400-level course** and thus **not** an introductory course in college-level research and writing. I therefore expect students to be sufficiently prepared to complete all work according to advanced-undergraduate standards. The subject matter specific to this course may be new to you—that is what you are here to learn, after all—but I expect all students to have sufficient skills in reading, research, and writing to succeed at the 400 level.

A	= 4.0 points awarded for <b>excellence</b> (not merely good work or effort).
BA	= 3.5 points
B	= 3.0 points
CB	= 2.5 points
C	= 2 points
DC	= 1.5 points
D	= 2
F	= 0 points for work not turned in; .5 for work that does not meet minimum standards.

At any time during the semester, you are encouraged to stop by during office hours (or make an appointment) to discuss your progress in the course.

## Schedule of Reading and Writing Assignments

I reserve the right to make minor adjustments or massive changes to this syllabus as a result of interference from reality. Also, additional activities and readings may be assigned in class. If you come to class every day and follow along with any announced changes, you'll never be out of the loop. You are also encouraged to check our class updates page <<http://www.retroflexive.com/472updates>> regularly for news, schedule changes, and announcements. Class lectures and discussions will not be linear recapitulations of readings; lectures and readings complement each other. Therefore, you will be expected to **come to class having read all assignments in advance of class discussions** so that you can participate fully.

### Week 1: Introduction to course: What is Language Variation?

Jan 05

- Approaches to the study of language variation.
- Why dialects exist.
- What every student of the English language needs to know about linguistics.

### Week 2: What is a Dialect?; and an Introduction to Phonology

Jan 10-12

For Monday: Read Foreword to *Language in the USA*, and online library reserve article: Algeo and Pyles, "The Sounds of Current English."

Discussion topics:

- Linguistic and independent variables.
- Places and manners of sound articulation.
- Fun with IPA: Learning phonetic transcription.

### Week 3: Influences on variation. Also, continue work on IPA and places/manners of articulation.

Jan 17-19

No class Mon., January 17, in observance of MLK Day.

For Wed.: *USA* Ch. 1, "American English: Its Origins and History," and Ch. 2: "American English and its Distinctiveness."

Discussion topics:

- The diversity of American English.
- Review places and manners of articulation and practice transcription.
- Paper/projects assigned (due Friday, March 18, at 5 p.m.)

### Week 4: Regional and social variation in American English.

Jan 24-26

For Mon.: *USA* Ch. 3:and "Regional Dialects." Ch. 4: "Social Varieties of American English."

Discussion topics:

- Language variation and geography.
- Social and ethnic variation.
- More fun with transcription.

### **Week 5: Language variation and the South**

Jan 31-Feb 02

For Mon.: *USA* Ch. 26: "Language Attitudes to Speech," and Lippi-Green, "Hillbillies, Rednecks, and Southern Belles," in course pack.

For Wed.: Preston, "The South: The Touchstone," in course pack.

Discussion topics:

- Perceptual dialectology and language attitudes.
- The linguistically compelling South.

### **Week 6: Language in the African American community.**

Feb 07-09

For Mon.: *USA* Ch. 5: "African American English," and Lippi-Green, "The Real Trouble with Black English," in course pack.

For Wed.: *USA* Ch. 16: "Ebonics and Its Controversy."

Discussion topics:

- African American English.
- AAVE and Ebonics in the classroom and beyond.

### **Week 7: Landmarks in language variation research; review for midterm exam.**

Feb 14-16

For Mon.: *USA* Ch. 6: "The *Dictionary of American Regional English*."

For Wed.: Kretzschmar et. al., from the *Handbook of the Linguistic Atlas*, in course pack.

Discussion topics:

- The *Dictionary of American Regional English* and the Linguistic Atlas projects.
- Other landmarks in modern sociolinguistics.
- Review for midterm.

### **Week 8: Midterm exam Monday, February 21; language variation in educational contexts.**

Feb 21-23

- Midterm exam Monday.

For Wed.: *USA* Ch 18: "Language and Education."

- Discussion topic: Language variation in the classroom.

**Week 9:** Feb 28-Mar 02 Spring Break! No classes.

### **Week 10: Stylistic variation; language and gender. Last date to withdraw from classes: Mon., March 07.**

Mar 07-09

For Mon.: Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, "Dialects and Style," in course pack.

For Wed.: *USA* Ch 22: "Language, Gender, and Sexuality," and Holmes, "Women's Talk: The Question of Sociolinguistic Universals," in course pack.

Discussion topics:

- Stylistic and intraspeaker variation.
- Theoretical approaches to language and gender.

**Week 11: More on language and gender.**

Mar 14-16

For Mon.: Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, "Communities of Practice: Where Language, Gender, and Power All Live," and Cameron, "Performing Gender Identity," in course pack.

Monday discussion topics:

- Other approaches to language and gender.
- Seeing for ourselves: language and gender class activity.
  
- **No class Wednesday: Work on papers for Friday submission.**
- **Papers due Friday, March 18, by 5 p.m. Turn in at the English department office, 6th floor Sprau.**

**Week 12: Variation in literature and media.**

Mar 21-23

For Mon.: *USA* Ch. 23, "Linguistic Identity and Community in American Literature," and Minnick, "Performing Southernness: Dialectal Representations and Southern Linguistic Identity," from course pack.  
For Wed.: Minnick, "A High, Holy Purpose: Dialect in Charles W. Chesnutt's *Conjure Tales*."

Discussion topic:

- Representing variation in literary and media discourse.

**Week 13: The Northern Cities Shift; begin work on class project: the Northern Cities Shift at Western.**

Mar 28-30

For Mon.: Online readings to be assigned in class. Check updates page if you missed the assignment.  
For Wed.: Work on methodology for Northern Cities Shift project.

Discussion topics:

- What is the Northern Cities Shift?
- Listening for the shift.
- Collaborative project: **The Northern Cities Shift in Kalamazoo.**

**Week 14: Continue work on Northern Cities Shift projects.**

Apr 04-06

For Mon.: Gathering and analyzing data.  
For Wed.: Data analysis.

Discussion topics:

- Work on Northern Cities Shift projects.

**Week 15: Last week of class! Northern Cities Shift projects due Wednesday, April 13; final thoughts and review for final exam.**

April 11-13

- The politics of American English.
- Review for final exam. April 13: last day of class.
- **Northern Cities Shift projects due Wednesday at class time.**

**Week 16: Final Exam: Thursday, April 21, 12:30-2:30 p.m.**